

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

January 25, 2012

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Meeting Date: January 25, 2012

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Michael Naughton, Andrew Killeen, Roy Rosenblatt and Lynn Reynolds

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Pat Allen, Christopher Boutwell and Mark Fairbrother

Others Present: Frank Abbondanzio (Town Administrator), Carolyn Olsen (Town Accountant), Debra Bourbeau (Town Clerk), Patricia Dion (Treasurer/Tax Collector), Walter Ramsey (Director of Planning and Community Development), David Jensen (Building Inspector), and Regina McNeely (Director of Health)

Minutes

Board of Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of November 16, 2011.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Board of Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 11, 2012.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 18, 2012.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Discussions

Town Clerk

- Ms. Bourbeau gave an overview of what the Town Clerk's office does, with an emphasis on work regarding elections.
- Ms. Bourbeau also presented some town records books from 1754 to 1857 showing the need to preserve these records.
 - Ms. Bourbeau has requested a supplemental appropriation of \$6,690 to preserve some of the oldest records. These books would be taken apart, bathed with chemicals to de-acidify it, and each page would be encased in an archival sleeve before being re-bound.
 - The company recommended having the records microfilmed rather than scanned to ensure that the result will be usable in the future.
 - The cost of preserving three books is \$5,870. The additional cost to either microfilm or scan three books is \$820 for a total of \$6,690. The total would increase to \$7,510 if the three books were both scanned and microfilmed.
 - There are three other books that Ms. Bourbeau would like to preserve, but they are in slightly better shape.
- Ms. Allen suggested that the records be scanned and put on the website.

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- Mr. Hanold noted two issues, do we do anything, and if so how much do we do.
- There was discussion over whether scanning the information to a compact disc or microfilming would provide the best means to ensure future use. Mr. Naughton said that if the information is scanned in pdf format it should not be a huge problem to later convert it to a different format as technology changes.
- Mr. Naughton suggested that this be a special article rather than part of the operating budget. It was recommended to request \$14,872 for all 6 books including microfilm and scanning to compact discs. Town Meeting then has the option of doing less.
- Ms. Bourbeau will get additional quotes and prepare a special article to preserve all six books, with breakdown of cost for preservation, scanning, and microfilming.
- Ms. Allen asked about the Fiscal Year 2013 budget increase in temporary wages. There are 3 elections in Fiscal Year 2013. There is only one election in Fiscal Year 2012.

Treasurer/Tax Collector

- Ms. Dion provided and reviewed a printed overview of what her office does.
- Mr. Hanold noted that Ms. Dion was requested to request a realistic amount for the tax title expense budget, and this was done.
- Mr. Hanold asked about the future of tax title expenses. Ms. Dion still waits 3 years before putting properties into tax title. Last year they year started with 63 parcels to go into tax title, but only 9 went into tax title. Part of this was accomplished by writing to mortgage companies, who will often pay the tax bills so they don't lose money by having the property taken.
- Ms. Dion provided a debt schedule through 2028.
- There will be no increase in employee or retiree health insurance for Fiscal Year 2013. The HCGIT has been using reserves to help maintain the premium levels, and the group had a very good experience rate over the last year.

Planning

- Mr. Ramsey reviewed his department's missions as shown on the town website.
- Mr. Ramsey provided and reviewed a budget narrative which provided information on projects being worked on this year and planned for next year.
- Mr. Hanold noted that many downtown properties are on long term lease with Powertown, and those leases expire in 2016. Some of these were once commercial but are now mostly residential. Mr. Ramsey is doing a retail feasibility analysis of these buildings. Mr. Abbondanzio has spoken to Powertown about getting the commercial space re-established.
- Mr. Hanold asked where savings from ESCO project will show. Those savings will be seen in lower utility bills.
- Mr. Naughton asked to see documentation of how the savings are guaranteed.

Board of Health

- Ms. McNeely provided a power point presentation on all the things that the Board of Health is required to do.
- Ms. McNeely reviewed her request to increase the annual stipends for the Animal Inspector and Barn Inspector.
- The Animal Inspector has to be on call every day (or on Monday for calls that come in over the weekend) to quarantine animals that bite people and to quarantine pets that have been bitten by an unknown or wild animal. The Animal Inspector also must annually inspect and report on all barns, including the animals that live there. This piece is what has been broken out as the Barn Inspector stipend.
- Ms. Reynolds noted that the pay per inspection was very low and questioned how anyone could afford to do it. The Barn Inspector makes less than \$10 per barn inspected. Mr. Naughton asked if \$500 would be adequate to get a qualified person. Ms. McNeely suggested that \$700 would probably be adequate to interest and retain a qualified person.
- Ms. McNeely said that if her request for a part-time inspector is approved, this person could do both of these inspections. Ms. McNeely unsure how stipends would be handled in this case. Ms. Olsen to check on how to handle schedule II if there were a part-time inspector whose duties included those inspections.
- Mr. Naughton asked the difference between an animal inspector and an animal control officer. Since the town no longer has an animal control officer, a lot of things have fallen back on the Board of Health, even though there is a police officer who is supposed to have taken over that function. Animal inspection is rabies control by quarantine and barn inspection. Animal control is animal complaints, barking, roaming, etc.
- Mr. Naughton asked if it would make sense to change the animal inspector to a per job stipend as we do for part time inspectors. Ms. McNeely said no because of the difficulty in projecting a budget and the possibility of going over budget.
- Ms. McNeely also reviewed her request for a part-time inspector as a supplemental request. This position would help to ensure that mandated inspections are done, as well as pursuing other issues that Ms. McNeely does not have time to do. If this is a 20 hour per week position, there may be additional costs for benefits.
- Mr. Hanold asked what Board of Health members are available to do. The response is that board members are generally policy makers, and while they help out during things like large temporary food events, they are not available for general inspections.
- Mr. Boutwell noted that, over the last 10 years, the board has changed from being pro-active to being mostly reactive.
- Ms. Allen asked about the earlier request to put the board of health in the public safety area of the budget. Ms. McNeely would still like to see this done.
- Ms. McNeely also noted that the Parks and Recreation department is better funded than the Board of Health.

Building Inspector

- Mr. Jensen briefly reviewed what his department does and current issues.
- Mr. Jensen is dealing with an increasing number of vacant property issues and “problem” buildings.
- The various departments work together on several types of problems to determine the best and most efficient use of resources.
- Mr. Rosenblatt asked if a part time health inspector would also be able to look for building code violations. Mr. Jensen stated that anyone qualified to do housing inspections should be able to at least ask appropriate questions if a building code violation is suspected.
- Mr. Killeen left at 8:24 PM.
- Mr. Hanold asked if there was any need to adjust the hourly rates for part-time inspectors. Mr. Jensen noted that these are not money-making jobs and are as much of a community service opportunity as employment.
- Mr. Jensen reviewed his supplemental request to purchase building code books. These books would be bought at a membership price and sold to contractors with a small price increase to cover costs. Part of the rationale is that Mr. Jensen spends a lot of time with contractors interpreting code issues. After discussion, it was suggested that even if all contractors had the books, there would still be interpretation questions and further that there may be legal or ethical issues with buying things at a special membership rate and then reselling to the public.
- Mr. Jensen reviewed his supplemental request to purchase a scanner. Ms. Reynolds offered to give the department her old one. Mr. Jensen will check to see if her scanner will meet their needs.
- Mr. Jensen reviewed his top priority supplemental request to reclassify the department secretary’s position. Mr. Jensen noted that in the last classification study, the previous employee filled out the job description in a fairly conservative way and did not include a lot of responsibilities. It’s a hard job to train for and the current employee deserves a more accurate job description. Mr. Abbondanzio noted that several people feel that their jobs have changed and that a job survey needs to be included in the pay and classification study. Mr. Hanold noted that re-grading because a person is particularly good at the job is not a good thing, but that re-grading should focus on the requirements of the position. The consensus from the Board of Selectmen is that this should be included in the wage and classification study rather than being treated separately.

Topics not anticipated within the 48 hour posting requirement

- Mr. Hanold noted that the Board of Selectmen has set May 5th as the date for the Annual Town Meeting.
- Mr. Hanold distributed an updated calendar for the budget process.

MA Municipal Association Update

Mr. Abbondanzio presented information he learned at the recent conference.

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List of Documents and Exhibits –

- Minutes of November 16, 2011
- Minutes of January 11, 2012
- Minutes of January 18, 2012
- Revised Assessment from the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District
- Treasurer/Collector Office information
- Debt Schedule through 2028.
- Planning and Conservation Budget Narrative
- Handout from Board of Health on Animal Control and Animal Inspections
- Handout from Mr. Abbondanzio –Summary of Budget Discussions at the MMA Annual Conference
- Updated calendar (updated 1/25/12)
- State Aid Estimates (released 1/25/12)

Next Meetings

- 5:30 PM February 1, 2012 Public Safety
- 6:00 PM February 8, 2012 Public Works
- 6:00 PM February 15, 2012 various departments

Adjourned 8:55 PM